

Week Ending Friday, July 4, 1997

The President's Radio Address

June 28, 1997

Good morning. Today I'm speaking to you from the East Room of the White House, where I'm joined by hundreds of America's brightest high school students. These Presidential Scholars are here in our Nation's Capital to learn how democracy works, and we know we can make it work much, much better.

I want to talk to you this morning about steps I'm taking to open the airwaves so voters have the loudest voice in our democracy, and about responsibility of Congress to clean up the campaign finance system.

Our democracy is the oldest and most successful in the world, but we know that there is something wrong with the way we pay for elections. Our campaign finance laws were last rewritten 23 years ago. For quite a long while those laws worked well, but they have been overwhelmed by a flood of money and the changes in the way we communicate with one another and the cost of communication.

Spending in congressional campaigns has risen sixfold in the last two decades. That's more than 3 times the rate of inflation. Now both political parties are locked into an ever-escalating arms race, as they compete to raise more and more money. There's simply too much money required for campaigns, it takes too much time to raise, and it raises too many questions.

In my State of the Union Address, I challenged the Congress to act to stem the rising tide of campaign money by passing comprehensive, bipartisan campaign finance reform by July 4th, the date we celebrate the birth of our democracy. Unfortunately, Congress has made little progress toward reform since that time, and it's clear that the legislation will not pass, will not even be voted on by Independence Day. That's too bad because there has been a significant number

of bipartisan support for the McCain-Feingold bill, which I have also endorsed.

But now we shouldn't wait for Congress to act, and I'm not waiting. Within my power as President, I've acted to advance key elements of reform, and I'll continue to do so. First, I have petitioned the Federal Election Commission to ban so-called soft money contributions, the large contributions from corporations, labor unions, and individuals that both parties raise. Bipartisan lawmakers led by Representatives Chris Shays and Marty Meehan have asked for the same thing. I am pleased that the FEC will begin formal proceedings on our request next month.

Second, our Justice Department will fight in the courts to uphold efforts to limit campaign spending. We know how a spending spiral can have dangerous consequences, but for two decades, court cases have made it very hard to enact tough limits. Right now, strong spending limits passed for elections in Cincinnati, and judicial elections across Ohio are being challenged. We believe spending limits are constitutional, and if we need to, we'll make that case to the highest court in the land.

And we're acting to address the single greatest reason for out-of-control costs, spending on television. In 1972, candidates spent \$25 million for political ads; in 1996, \$400 million. We're the only major democracy in the world that does it this way, and it doesn't have to be this way. We can make our most powerfully effective medium a powerful force for expanding democracy. Free TV time can help free our democracy from the grip of big money.

For years I have supported giving candidates free time, and in fact, Vice President Gore proposed legislation to do that a decade ago when he was in the United States Senate. Now we're working to make it happen. In March I called on the Federal Communications Commission to require broadcasters to give candidates free time as a condition of

receiving a new, lucrative license for high-tech digital TV. That's the least we can ask of broadcasters, who are given access to the public airwaves, worth billions of dollars, at no cost, with only the requirement that they meet a basic public obligation. Today I'm appointing two distinguished Americans to lead a commission that will help the FCC decide precisely how free broadcast time can be given to candidates as part of the broadcasters' public interest obligations.

Les Moonves is the president of CBS Entertainment and one of America's most prominent and creative broadcasters. And Dr. Norman Ornstein, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is one of America's best known political scientists and a renowned expert on campaign finance reform. Their commission will explore the details of free time for candidates and other public interest obligations, such as children's broadcasting, which may need to be updated.

All these steps are important, but still they're no substitute for legislation. Again I say, Congress must act to pass comprehensive bipartisan legislation. And as I said before, Senators John McCain and Russ Feingold, joined by Representatives Shays and Meehan, have strong legislation that would limit spending, end soft money, and give candidates free time or reduced-rate TV time. I'm pleased to report that Senators McCain and Feingold have announced they will bring their bill to a vote later this summer in the Senate. This will be our first chance to see who's for real on the issue of reform.

Needed change has been filibustered to death in every Congress for a decade. In my first term, it was filibustered to death each and every year. Now the same people who filibustered reform before, whose obstruction gave us the present system, have vowed to do it again. Let's let the people be heard. Let's not let them get away with it. Every Senator must realize that a vote for a filibuster is a vote to continue undue special interests influence, soft money contributions, out-of-control spending, and continued public skepticism about the way the political process works.

When it comes to fixing our campaign finance system, let's make this summer a time

not of talk but of action, not of recriminations but of results. We have a rare chance to restore the trust and earn the participation of the American people. The way we pay for elections is broken; it's time to fix it. I ask for your support. And thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6:09 p.m. on June 27 in the East Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 28.

Remarks on Departure for Boston, Massachusetts, and an Exchange With Reporters

June 30, 1997

Tax Cut Proposal

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, now that the two Houses of Congress have completed action on their tax plan, I would like to make some comments and offer my plan for what I think should be done with the tax portion of the balanced budget agreement.

By way of background, let me point out again, as I have said many times, I was determined to change the economic policy of the United States Government when I became President. We abandoned trickle-down and the big deficits and instead adopted an invest and grow strategy: reduce the deficit, invest in the education and skills of our people, and make sure we sold more American goods and services around the world. That has contributed, along with the ingenuity, hard work, and productivity of the American people, to the healthiest economy we've had in a generation.

I want the balanced budget we ultimately pass to continue to reinforce that strategy and our values. The agreement that we signed with the Republican and Democratic leaders of Congress reflects the invest and grow strategy. It is in balance with our values of honoring work, strengthening families, and offering opportunity. It eliminates the deficit, it invests in education, it extends health care for more of our children while securing Medicare for our parents, and it provides for an affordable tax cut for the American people.

America's families deserve a tax cut, and they deserve one that reflects their values. It is, after all, the energy and dedication of